



## **Sustainable Development between International and Domestic Forces**

**The Policy Experiences of Quebec, North Rhine-Westphalia and Flanders**

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## Executive Summary (in Dutch)

De doelstelling van deze paper is om te onderzoeken in hoeverre internationale ontwikkelingen het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid van subnationale overheden beïnvloeden. Dat is immers een van de factoren die weerhouden werden in het analytische model van project 3. Internationale ontwikkelingen worden geacht een grote rol te spelen omdat duurzame ontwikkeling grotendeels een ‘outside-in’-beleid is, d.w.z. een beleid dat zich ontwikkeld heeft op het internationale niveau en daarna intern vertaald moet worden. Ook vandaag nog vindt een groot deel van het beleidsdebat plaats in multilaterale fora, zoals de EU, de VN of de OESO.

Om internationale invloed op het vlak van duurzame ontwikkeling te onderzoeken, maakt deze paper gebruik van het begrip *transnationale communicatie*. Dat begrip verwijst naar een reeks van mechanismen die enkel uitgaan van informatie-uitwisseling en communicatie met andere overheden of internationale organisaties (in plaats van juridische verplichtingen of concurrentiedruk). Het begrip is afkomstig uit studies over beleidsoverdracht, en is om drie redenen nuttig voor deze paper. Ten eerste geeft het een belangrijke plaats aan internationale organisaties, die in het geval van duurzame ontwikkeling geacht worden een grote rol te spelen. Ten tweede is transnationale communicatie een nuttig instrument om ‘soft law’ te onderzoeken. Internationaal duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid bestaat immers vooral uit politieke verklaringen, aanbevelingen en strategieën, en niet uit bindende verplichtingen. Ten derde besteedt transnationale communicatie aandacht aan leerprocessen, wat uiterst relevant is in het geval van duurzame ontwikkeling.

We onderscheiden drie mechanismen van transnationale communicatie:

1. promotie van beleidsmodellen door internationale organisaties: Internationale organisaties willen beleidsinnovaties voor duurzame ontwikkeling versnellen door informatie, richtlijnen, goede voorbeelden en *benchmarks* te verspreiden. Hoewel duurzame ontwikkeling geen juridische druk of concurrentiedruk (m.b.t. regulering) veroorzaakt, kunnen internationale organisaties een zekere vorm van legitimiteitsdruk uitoefenen. Overheden worden ertoe aangezet bepaalde beleidsacties te ondernemen (bv. het uitbrengen van nationale strategieën duurzame ontwikkeling) om een legitiem lid te zijn van een internationale gemeenschap. Vooral multilaterale organisaties promoten beleidsmodellen op die manier. Het is echter belangrijk op te merken dat mondiale toppen (bv. Rio of Johannesburg) of sleutelmomenten (bv. het uitbrengen van het Brundtlandrapport) ook een cruciale rol spelen, omdat ze momentum creëren voor duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid. Het is onze hypothese dat subnationale overheden vooral invloed ondervinden via dit eerste mechanisme indien ze zelf betrokken zijn bij de internationale gebeurtenissen. De paper zoekt hier aansluiting bij project 4, en besteedt bij de bespreking van de cases daarom ook aandacht aan de betrokkenheid van subnationale overheden in internationaal duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid.
2. policy copying: Dit houdt twee verschillende processen in. Het *trekken van lessen* gebeurt wanneer overheden hun beleid aanpassen op basis van lessen die ze trekken uit de beleidservaringen van andere overheden. Dat gebeurt vooral in gevallen van onzekerheid. *Emulatie* is een gelijkaardig principe, maar in tegenstelling tot het trekken van lessen gebeurt het niet als resultaat van een leerervaring maar enkel uit conformisme. Overheden nemen dan een bepaald beleidsgedrag over omdat andere overheden rond hen hetzelfde doen. Sommige auteurs spreken in dat laatste geval dan ook van symbolische imitatie.
3. netwerken: Overheden zoeken m.b.t. bepaalde beleidsthema's contact met elkaar om informatie en ervaringen uit te wisselen. Dat kan op zeer informele manier gebeuren (bv.

in de marge van internationale meetings) of op een formele basis (bv. door het oprichten van transnationale netwerken van subnationale overheden). Op basis van die netwerk-activiteiten kunnen overheden beleidsveranderingen doorvoeren.

Met deze drie mechanismen in het achterhoofd geeft de paper een gedetailleerd overzicht van de internationale beleidsontwikkelingen voor duurzame ontwikkeling de voorbij 25 jaar, en beschrijft hoe duurzame ontwikkeling vandaag behandeld wordt in de belangrijkste multilaterale organisaties. Het overzicht is gebaseerd op het onderzoek dat uitgevoerd wordt in project 4.

Het overige deel van de paper is gewijd aan de analyse van drie cases: Québec, Noordrijn-Westfalen en Vlaanderen. Eerst wordt weergegeven in welke mate de overheden betrokken zijn bij internationaal duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid. Daarna geven we een antwoord op twee onderzoeksvragen. In de eerste plaats wordt nagegaan in hoeverre het ontstaan van een duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid veroorzaakt is door internationale ontwikkelingen. In de tweede plaats bekijken we of en hoe de beleidsinhoud concreet beïnvloed wordt door internationaal beleid. Bij beleidsinhoud wordt gekeken naar beleidsdoelen en beleidsinstrumenten.

Promotie van beleidsmodellen door internationale organisaties blijkt een zeer relevant mechanisme. In Québec en Noordrijn-Westfalen waren internationale gebeurtenissen het onrechtstreekse startschot van het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid. De activiteiten van de Brundtlandcommissie (in geval van Québec) en de Top van Rio (in beide gevallen) hebben de grondlagen gelegd voor de institutionalisering van duurzame ontwikkeling. Op basis van die grondlagen hebben politieke actoren in beide gevallen het uiteindelijke duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid bepaald. In Vlaanderen waren de internationale gebeurtenissen zelf het ondubbelzinnige startschot. De verregaande Vlaamse betrokkenheid bij de besluitvorming over de eerste EU Strategie Duurzame Ontwikkeling (EUSDO) en over de Top van Johannesburg (als gevolg van het Belgische Voorzitterschap van de EU), en de deelname aan de Top van Johannesburg zelf (inclusief het Gauteng-initiatief), waren de rechtstreekse oorzaken van de institutionalisering van duurzame ontwikkeling in Vlaanderen. In het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid van Québec en Vlaanderen is een sterke legitimiteitsdruk van internationale organisaties merkbaar: de duurzameontwikkelingsstrategie van beide overheden is er gekomen omwille van internationale afspraken (VN, EU, Verklaring van Gauteng). Dat staat in fel contrast met Noordrijn-Westfalen, waar die internationale druk helemaal niet waar te nemen is en eerder het idee leeft dat duurzame ontwikkeling bottom-up ontstaan is. Ten slotte stelt zich de vraag of het internationale beleid ook invloed uitoefent op de concrete beleidsinhoud. In Noordrijn-Westfalen hebben we zo'n invloed niet waargenomen. In Vlaanderen beperkt de invloed zich voornamelijk tot strategische beleidsdoelstellingen (bv. de thema's van de EUSDO). De meeste invloed is waar te nemen in Québec, waar internationale organisaties—waaronder ook de EU!—in beperkte mate invloed hebben uitgeoefend op enkele concrete beleidsinstrumenten.

Ook op het vlak van *policy copying* situeert de meeste invloed zich in de Québecse case. Daar heeft de overheid echt geïnvesteerd in het trekken van lessen van andere overheden, met name van andere Canadese provincies, van verschillende OESO-landen en van internationale organisaties. Zo vertoont het Québecse duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid opvallende gelijkenissen met dat van de Canadese federale overheid. Québec wil het echter beter doen dan de overheden waaruit het lessen trekt, wat de investering verklaart, en heeft dus ook geleerd uit de fouten van buitenlandse ervaringen. De wil om beter te doen sluit aan bij het discours van leiderschap van de opeenvolgende regeringen van de *Liberals*: Québec wil op het vlak van duurzame ontwikkeling een leider worden in Noord-Amerika. In de twee andere cases werden weinig voorbeelden van *policy copying* waargenomen. Belangrijk om te vermelden is wel de

symbolische imitatie van de EU-doelstellingen in de Vlaamse case. Dat is te verklaren door de normatieve kracht die de EU traditioneel uitoefent in Vlaanderen (en België), wat in de Duitse case niet het geval is.

Het is opvallend dat de drie overheden zeer actief zijn in allerlei vormen van netwerken. Toch is er van die verschillende netwerkactiviteiten geen concrete invloed op hun duurzame-ontwikkelingsbeleid te merken. Het lijkt erop dat zulke netwerken vooral gebruikt worden om betrokken te zijn bij multilaterale besluitvorming en voor *identity politics*, wat ook in vorige papers vastgesteld werd.

Het onderzoek in deze paper toont aan dat internationale ontwikkelingen een sleutelrol spelen bij het tot stand komen van duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid op subnationaal niveau. Vooral de grote mondiale topbijeenkomsten zijn daarbij cruciaal geweest. De betrokkenheid van subnationale overheden bij die ontwikkelingen is een doorslaggevende factor. De paper toont evenwel aan dat de invloed die waar te nemen is zich meestal beperkt tot een abstract niveau (bv. strategische beleidsdoelen, of de gehanteerde definitie of principes van duurzame ontwikkeling). Internationale invloed is veel minder merkbaar op het vlak van concrete beleidsinhoud, die in de meeste gevallen vooral beïnvloed is door de binnenlandse situatie. Het onderzoek heeft ook aangetoond dat internationale ontwikkelingen op zich niet voldoende zijn om duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid te verankeren. In elke case was de wil van politieke actoren noodzakelijk om de invloed te laten kristalliseren. In Québec was dat bij de terugkeer van de *Liberals* in de regering. In de twee Europese cases heeft de aanwezigheid van de groene partij in de coalitie een cruciale rol gespeeld. Vooral in Noordrijn-Westfalen bleek de steun van de groenen onontbeerlijk, aangezien met het verdwijnen van hun coalitie ook meteen het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid stopgezet werd. Een andere belangrijke factor blijkt de rol van een sterke identiteit. In cases waar subnationale overheden een internationale identiteit hebben (Québec en Vlaanderen), is er veel meer invloed van het internationale niveau waar te nemen, wat verklaard wordt door de legitimitetsdruk.

Deze paper onderstreept het belang van betrokkenheid bij multilateraal beleid en mondiale toppen. In het kader van een nakende 'Rio +20' kan die vaststelling ook in een Vlaamse beleidscontext interessant zijn. Daarbij komt dat Vlaanderen tijdens een Belgisch Voorzitterschap van de EU extra toegang krijgt tot multilaterale beleid, wat voorheen een zichtbare invloed heeft gehad op het Vlaamse duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid. Indien men echter ten volle wil profiteren van internationale invloeden is betrokkenheid op zich niet voldoende. De vergelijkende analyse toont aan dat politieke wil ook noodzakelijk is. Zo toont de Québecse case aan dat het trekken van lessen van andere overheden een reële investering vraagt, maar dat er ook concrete voordelen uit worden gehaald. In een Vlaamse beleidscontext wil project 3 daar uiteraard zelf een bijdrage toe leveren.

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<sup>1</sup> Happaerts S., Van den Brande K. & Bruyninckx H. (2008), Governance for sustainable development at the inter-subnational level. The case of the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (nrg4SD) (Working Paper n° 3). Leuven: Steunpunt Duurzame Ontwikkeling.

Happaerts S. (2008), Inter-subnational Networks for Sustainable Development. State-of-the-art and the Experiences of Flanders and Wallonia (Working Paper n° 8). Leuven: Steunpunt Duurzame Ontwikkeling.

## 1. Introduction

Since the publication of the Brundtland Report, the concept and policies of sustainable development have continually been discussed and designed in the international arena. Global summits in Rio (1992) and Johannesburg (2002) were important milestones in governance for sustainable development. A significant part of policy and decision-making for sustainable development still takes place in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the European Union (EU) (Van den Brande, 2009b, p. 3). The literature on governance for sustainable development confirms that it is primarily an ‘outside-in’ policy: a policy which is internationally decided and subsequently needs to be ‘brought home’ (Meadowcroft, 2008, p. 108; O’Toole, 2004, p. 34).

At the national level of governance, it is clear that international policy developments have triggered the institutionalization of sustainable development, e.g. through the development of national strategies for sustainable development (Meadowcroft, 2007). Yet also subnational governments have taken up the challenge to institutionalize sustainable development. We define a *subnational entity* as “a coherent territorial entity situated between local and national levels with a capacity for authoritative decision-making” (Marks et al., 2008, p. 113). This entails entities such as provinces, states or (micro)regions.<sup>2</sup> Although they have only rarely been the object of research (in contrast to local authorities), subnational governments have an important role to play in the sustainable development agenda. They are said to be closer to citizens and stakeholders than national governments (Berger, 2003, p. 226), which is vital for any sustainable development process. And more importantly, they are often responsible for the implementation of national and international policies with regard to sustainable development (OECD, 2002, p. 19).

*Governance for sustainable development*, the broader research domain to which this paper aims to contribute, refers to “processes of socio-political governance oriented towards the attainment of sustainable development” and it encompasses “public debate, political decision-making, policy formation and implementation, and complex interactions among public authorities, private business and civil society” (Meadowcroft, 2008, p. 107). In this paper we do not look at the specific policy issues that are important for sustainable development, which are manifold (e.g. climate change, sustainable agriculture, etc.). We rather approach sustainable development as a meta-policy or “a policy designed to guide the development of numerous more specific policies” (O’Toole, 2004, p. 38). We investigate whether subnational governments respond to the global call for sustainable development, and how they intend to integrate the issue into their policy and decision-making. Two main research questions are addressed. First, does the subnational government have a sustainable development policy and, if so, has it been *triggered* by international developments? Second, is the content of the government’s sustainable development policy *shaped* by international policy?

In order to study the influence of international policy and decision-making on lower levels of governance, several theoretical traditions could be tapped. The next section first presents an overview of theoretical literature on the influence of international developments on domestic policies. It then focuses on one of those possible traditions, i.e. policy transfer, and on the concept of transnational communication in particular, which we think is best suited to analyze

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We reserve the term ‘region(al)’ to denote the level of governance above the nation-state, e.g. the EU, as is common in international relations theory and the literature on global governance.

our research questions. This paper attempts to apply this concept on sustainable development and on subnational governments. Subsequently, we demonstrate how sustainable development is developed at the international level and can be considered as an 'outside-in' policy. Next, a comparative analysis studies the influence of international developments on the policies of three subnational governments: Quebec (Canada), North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) and Flanders (Belgium). Conclusions are presented in a final section.

## 2. Framing the topic

### 2.1 Literature overview

The role of international organizations and their impact on domestic policy processes has been studied for many years. One of the theoretical traditions within the political science literature concerns the work generated by some of the first scholars of international relations, who attempted to analyze the links between the international system and domestic politics and, in particular, the domestic impact of international rules and norms. The nation-state was usually the main unit of analysis in their research, which focused on 'hard' policy issues such as economy and security (e.g. Cortell and Davis, 1996; Gourevitch, 1978).

Another theory that touches upon the topic is implementation theory. It can be situated within the studies of public policy and is used to investigate the domestic implementation of international commitments and the internal policy processes and possible difficulties that it originates (e.g. Hanf, 2000; Victor et al., 1998). *Implementation* is defined as "the translation of agreed-upon international agreements into concrete policies" that "manifests itself in the adoption of rules or regulations, the passage of legislation or the creation of institutions (both domestic and international)" (Joachim et al., 2008, p. 6). Related to implementation theory are Europeanization studies, which aim to explain the impact of the EU on the domestic policies of its member states (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003; Knill and Lehmkuhl, 2002).<sup>3</sup> Yet although implementation theory has previously been applied to many sectoral policies, e.g. international environmental agreements (Hanf, 2001), some arguments can be given why it seems ill-suited for the purpose of our research. First of all, according to O'Toole (2004) not much implementation research has been conducted with regard to sustainable development policy because of the rather challenging nature of sustainable development *an sich*. Sustainable development indeed is a meta-policy and it poses particular challenges (not only to policy-makers but also to researchers) due to its conceptual vagueness, its complexity and the uncertainty related to policy choices and their outcomes (Bruyninckx, 2006, p. 270-271; Meadowcroft, 2008, p. 113). O'Toole also emphasizes that in order to manage the uncertainty brought along by sustainable development, it is important to thoroughly consider learning processes (O'Toole, 2004, p. 47, 54-55), which are usually not discussed by implementation researchers. Second, implementation research is mostly used for analyzing the implementation of hard law (e.g. EU regulations and directives, international treaties and agreements) rather

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Europeanization studies have already paid attention to subnational governments (Bursens and Deforche, 2008; Fleurke and Willemsse, 2006).



than soft law (e.g. Bursens, 2001; Hanf, 2001).<sup>4</sup> The distinction between hard and soft law is important here, since international negotiations on sustainable development mainly result in soft law, such as political declarations, policy recommendations, guidelines and strategies (Kraemer et al., 2003; Snyder, 1994). Third, the theory is at first intended for examining implementation by national governments and less appropriate to capture the specific situation of subnational governments, which are not usually the ones formally committing to international agreements. Implementation theory will thus not be used as a framework in this paper.

Alternatively, several theoretical traditions which are brought together under the conceptual umbrella of 'policy transfer' (Brans et al., 2003, p. 128-129) offer an approach that could be more useful for the theoretical framing of our topic. Policy diffusion studies, for instance, are concerned with the spread of certain policy innovations over time and look at the adoption processes of those innovations (Knill, 2005, p. 766; Tews, 2007). An example is the recent interest in the spread of so-called 'new environmental policy instruments' (Jörgens, 2001; Kern et al., 2001; Tews et al., 2003). Similarly, the study of policy convergence investigates the factors that determine the processes according to which policies converge across (mostly national) jurisdictions (Knill, 2005, p. 764). Within this literature on policy transfer, international governance processes traditionally occupy an important place among the factors determining cross-national policy diffusion and convergence (Bennett, 1988, p. 420; Holzinger and Knill, 2008, p. 404; Holzinger et al., 2008, p. 556). Several mechanisms concerning the influence of the international level of governance are cited, such as regulatory competition, international harmonization and transnational communication. Some of them, however, are not expected to be very relevant for the analysis of sustainable development policies of subnational governments. An example is regulatory competition. That mechanism explains the mutual adjustment of policies across jurisdictions through the increased economic integration of markets and abolition of trade barriers, which stimulates regulatory competitiveness. According to Holzinger and Knill (2005, p. 789), convergence is only expected for trade-related policies, comprising products and production processes. Since we look at sustainable development from a meta-perspective (cf *supra*), we assume that regulatory competition will not offer a valid explanation for our research questions. Another mechanism that seems less appropriate is international harmonization. It refers to the situation in which national governments are legally required to adopt certain policies, in order to comply with binding international commitments (Holzinger et al., 2008, p. 556). International harmonization processes do not fit the purpose of our research because international sustainable development policy is not defined by binding international agreements or other legal requirements, but by soft law. We rather think that the different mechanisms studied under the denominator of transnational communication are useful for our analysis. *Transnational communication* refers to a set of mechanisms that presuppose nothing but information exchange and communication (rather than, for instance, competitive pressure or legal requirements) with other governments or international organizations (Holzinger et al., 2008, p. 559). It focuses, *inter alia*, on learning

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According to Snyder, *soft law* refers to the "rules of conduct which in principle have no legally binding force but which nevertheless may have practical effects" (Snyder, cited in Trubek et al., 2005, p. 1). Abbott and Snidal define *hard law*, in contrast, as "legally binding obligations that are precise (or can be made precise through adjudication or the issuance of detailed regulations) and that delegate authority for interpreting or implementing the law" (Abbott and Snidal, 2000, p. 421). Only recently researchers have been investigating the implementation of soft law (e.g. the case of employment policy in López-Santana, 2006).

processes and networking, which makes it an interesting perspective in a sustainable development context. Indeed, learning is crucial for managing uncertainty with regard to sustainable development policy (O'Toole, 2004, cf supra) and it encourages subnational governments to participate in transnational networks (Happaerts et al., 2010). By focusing on transnational communication and by conducting an in-depth analysis of the role of transnational communication processes in three specific subnational cases, we follow the findings of Holzinger et al. about transnational communication as an area for future and more detailed research:

*“the high relevance of transnational communication indicates a further issue that deserves particular attention in future research. In this regard the focus should be on a more detailed analysis of concrete processes through which transnational communication has its convergent effects” (Holzinger et al., 2008, p. 585)*

The next section discusses the three most important mechanisms of transnational communication and shows how they can be valuable for an analysis of the sustainable development policies of subnational governments. We pay particular attention to the possible role of international organizations and international policy-making.

## 2.2 Mechanisms of transnational communication

A first mechanism of transnational communication is the *promotion of policy models by international organizations*. In order to accelerate the diffusion of certain policy innovations, those organizations disseminate information on best practices, evaluations of existing models, propositions on broad goals or standards, or benchmarks of their members' performances. They thus function as mediators of policy transfer without legal pressure or enforcement (Holzinger and Knill, 2008, p. 405; Kern et al., 2001, p. 9; Tews et al., 2003, p. 573). If governments adopt the promoted policies, it is rather because of legitimacy pressures exerted by international organizations (Holzinger and Knill, 2005, p. 785). In the area of sustainable development, global organizations such as the UN or the OECD, and regional organizations such as the EU, are expected to play a role. Moreover, in the context of promotion of policy models by international organizations, we believe a significant role is put aside for key international meetings, such as the Rio and Johannesburg Summits (see also Kern et al., 2001, p. 23; Tews et al., 2003, p. 572). Those meetings attract a large number of governmental delegations and create publicity and political momentum for certain topics. Moreover, at such international events (non-binding) political agreements are often negotiated and policy solutions are promoted by the organizing institutions. In short, although sustainable development does not result in binding international agreements, international organizations still play an important role in the development of sustainable development policies, through the promotion of policy models and the diffusion of information to policy-makers. We believe that this form of influence can be equally relevant for subnational governments as it is for national governments, especially if the subnational governments in question<sup>5</sup> show an interest in international policy and aim to be involved in multilateral decision-making.

A second mechanism of transnational communication is *policy copying*, either through lesson-drawing or policy emulation (Holzinger and Knill, 2008, p. 410). Lesson-drawing denotes a

<sup>5</sup> Tews et al. (2003, p. 572) also suggest that the degree of integration in the international system is determining for those processes.

rational learning process through which a government uses policy experiences of other governments to solve domestic problems (Holzinger and Knill, 2005, p. 783). Since governments will most especially turn to lesson-drawing in cases of uncertainty (Holzinger and Knill, 2008, p. 410; Tews et al., 2003, p. 594), learning processes are highly relevant in the context of sustainable development. Jørgensen (2007) shows that this mechanism is also used by subnational governments. Policy emulation is a similar process, but instead of being motivated by the value of the policy solution in question, it is driven by a desire of conformity. Through policy emulation governments do not copy a policy because they believe it is a valuable innovation, but because they observe others around them adopting that policy and do not want to be left behind. In some cases the emulation can be used to legitimize decisions the government had already made (Holzinger and Knill, 2005, p. 784-785; 2008, p. 405; Kern et al., 2001, p. 10; Tews et al., 2003, p. 575). When emulation is merely used for reasons such as seeking credibility or conformity with international trends, some authors speak of 'symbolic imitation' (Meseguer, 2005, p. 73). Lesson-drawing and policy emulation are very similar processes, differing only with regard to the government's motivation.

Besides the promotion of policy models by international organizations and processes of policy copying, transnational communication includes mechanisms based on communication through *networking*. Authors describe policy transfer through 'elite networking', 'policy communities' or 'epistemic communities' (Bennett, 1991, p. 224; Brans et al., 2003, p. 124-125; Holzinger et al., 2008, p. 559). The argument departs from the observation that different governments (or governmental officials) join together in transnational networks, formal or informal, with regard to specific policy areas or themes. Those networks facilitate information-sharing, deliberation and learning with regard to certain policy problems (Holzinger et al., 2008, p. 559; Tews et al., 2003, p. 573). In addition, they engage in joint problem-solving activities (Holzinger and Knill, 2005, p. 784), driven by the belief that joint or similar responses are more effective in dealing with common challenges. Like other actors, subnational governments have created many such transnational networks, including for the issue of sustainable development (Happaerts et al., 2009; 2010). Similar networking functions are performed by international organizations or regimes. Besides promoting certain policy models, they also facilitate information-sharing and deliberation.

We believe these three mechanisms of transnational communication are useful analytical categories to study the influence of international policy-making on the sustainable development policies of subnational governments. Unlike in other theoretical traditions, they do not focus on the required implementation of binding international requirements by national governments, but offer a useful perspective for international policy issues identified as soft law, such as sustainable development. Yet it must be noted that these three mechanisms will not always appear as delineated categories, but are often linked to each other. International organizations are promoters of policy models, but they can also serve as networks for the officials of the participating governments, insofar as the delegations include subnational officials. Moreover, policy copying (through lesson-drawing or emulation) is facilitated by the activities of international organizations and by networking.<sup>6</sup> International organizations as well as networks invest in the identification and diffusion of best practices, which stimulates policy copying. Networks, in addition, are often linked to the activities of international organizations.

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For instance, previous comparative research has shown that the Basque Country is one of the most active members in transnational networks of subnational governments, and that it explicitly uses the activities of those networks for lesson-drawing (Happaerts et al., 2010, p. 139).

Indeed, many transnational networks are created with the aim of influencing decision-making in international organizations (Happaerts et al., 2010, p. 129). Although it has to be acknowledged that transnational communication does not exclusively happen through international organizations, it is clear that it ascribes a significant role to international organizations and events. They will also be the main focus of our analysis. In the next section we give a short outline of how sustainable development has been developed in the international arena (3.1), and of which multilateral organizations promote sustainable development policies (3.2).

### **3. The ‘outside’ character of sustainable development policy**

#### **3.1 The international sustainable development debate: Brundtland, Rio, Johannesburg and beyond**

For many authors, the discussion of sustainable development starts with the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) that gathered in Stockholm in 1987 (Bruyninckx, 2006, p. 266; Lafferty, 1996). That Commission, also referred to as the Brundtland Commission, was asked by the UN General Assembly to formulate “a global agenda for change” (WCED 1987, p. ix). Its outcome, the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future*, provides a concrete definition of how sustainable development needs to be interpreted, i.e. “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987, p. 43), and emphasizes the global and common character of the challenges that the North and the South are facing. The report consists of recommendations regarding common concerns, challenges and endeavours and ends with a call for action in order to achieve a sustainable future development of the world (WCED 1987, p. 22). The report’s main merit has been an increasing awareness among policy-makers, scholars and civil society and the launch of the international debate on sustainable development (Sneddon et al., 2006, p. 255).

Following the call by the Brundtland Commission (WCED 1987, p. 23), the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was convened in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, commonly known as the Rio or Earth Summit. The positive international context during which the summit was organized paved the way for constructive discussions about the interpretation of the concept. The focus of the discussions shifted from defining the concept to shaping policies through policy principles in order to achieve sustainable development worldwide (Bruyninckx, 2006, p. 268). 27 policy principles were formulated and incorporated in the Rio Declaration that needed to provide guidance to states and civil society (Elliott, 1998, p. 20-22; UNCED 1992b). An extensive action programme consisting of 40 chapters, called Agenda 21, needed to provide further clarification about how to implement the principles of the Rio Declaration (UNCED 1992a). It gives concrete recommendations on a wide range of implementing mechanisms, such as financial instruments, science, education or international law. This ‘blueprint for sustainable development’ has been ratified by 178 UN member states and emphasizes the importance of national governments in the implementation of sustainable development. Examples of concrete actions suggested by Agenda 21 are the adoption of a national strategy for sustainable development (UNCED 1992a, §8.7) and the preparation of national reports (UNCED 1992a, §38.38). Particular attention is also given to international and regional organizations and to the initiatives of local authorities. Subnational governments, however, are largely neglected. Both the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 are internationally

endorsed outcome documents of the Rio Summit (Adger and Jordan, 2009, p. 9), but can be categorized as soft law (Pallemmaerts, 2003, p. 194). Another outcome of the Rio Summit is the establishment of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The CSD was entitled to follow-up the progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21 and has gathered yearly from 1993 on (cf. *infra*). Although the final achievements of this summit have been criticized by many, Rio has also been lauded for the momentum it has created and for the increasing political and public awareness about sustainable development issues (Elliott, 1998, p. 25-26).<sup>7</sup> The Rio Summit also generated wide-spread support for the vision that sustainable development entails three dimensions, a social, economic and environmental one (UNCED 1992a, §8.41).

Between the Rio Summit in 1992 and the next global summit in 2002 in Johannesburg, many international conferences and events took place. Not all of them will be discussed here, but it is interesting to mention the so-called 'Rio +5 Summit' that took place in 1997. As a Special Session of the UN General Assembly, it decided upon a Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and it set 2002 as the year in which the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development should be finished (UNGASS 1997, §24a). Ten years after the Rio Summit, the lack of implementation of Agenda 21 provided the necessary impulse for organizing a new World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD, also called Johannesburg Summit) that would especially focus on strengthening the implementation of Agenda 21. The Johannesburg Summit resulted in a comprehensive Plan of Implementation together with a political declaration endorsed by 191 UN member states. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation included a pledge of governments to further complete their national strategies for sustainable development and implement them by 2005 (WSSD 2002, §162b). Suggested by Agenda 21 and reinforced by Rio +5, many national governments still lacked a national strategy for sustainable development. Like in Agenda 21, references to subnational governments are largely absent in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Because of their lack of representation in the international debate on sustainable development, subnational governments organized a parallel conference in the margins of the Johannesburg Summit. In the resulting Gauteng Declaration, the signatory governments committed to developing a subnational sustainable development strategy. It also laid the foundations for the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (nrg4SD). Nrg4SD aims at representing subnational governments in global decision-making for sustainable development and at promoting sustainable development at the subnational level through the exchange of information and best practices (Happaerts et al., 2010).

The Rio and Johannesburg Summits have raised high-level political and public awareness and have placed sustainable development policies on the international agenda. In December 2009, the UN General Assembly decided to organize a new World Summit in 2012 in Brazil "for the Follow-up on Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the WSSD" (UNGA 2009). The expectation is that this 'Rio +20' will give new breath to the international sustainable development debate. The question remains, however, if it will help forward the implementation of Agenda 21.

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The Rio Summit, among other things, also resulted in three legally binding international agreements, i.e. the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, UN Convention on Biodiversity and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. Because of the focus of our paper those will not be discussed.

## 3.2 Multilateral decision-making for sustainable development

Our discussion of the three mechanisms of transnational communication showed that international organizations play a central role in the development of sustainable development policies. They can promote policy models, facilitate policy copying by showing examples of best practices, and provide a place for networking. In addition, they organize events, such as global summits, that are determining for the international sustainable development debate. In the context of sustainable development, two global and one regional organization seem to play an important role in the sustainable development debate (Van den Brande, 2009b), i.e. the UN and the OECD at the global level (Adger and Jordan, 2009, p. 17) and the EU at the regional level.

At the Rio Summit, it was decided that a UN commission, the CSD, would follow-up the implementation of Agenda 21 (UNDESA 2008). From then on, the programme of work of the CSD would determine the international sustainable development agenda and the CSD would be the main global international organization for discussing sustainable development issues on a yearly basis. In that way the CSD has kept the international debate on sustainable development alive during the period between the summits of Rio and Johannesburg, although its yearly sessions generally receive less attention. The CSD also has to provide policy guidance and options for future activities; and has to promote dialogue and build partnerships for sustainable development (UNDESA 2010). More concretely, the CSD attaches great importance to national reporting, in order to review and monitor how national governments are implementing Agenda 21 (Kern et al., 2001, p. 9; UNDESA 2003, p. 1). When looking at the goals and the functioning of the CSD, some examples of the mechanisms of transnational communication can clearly be distinguished. The CSD aims to provide policy guidance through the formulation of policy recommendations at the end of a policy year. A certain kind of influence is thus being exercised on the policy models of governments (at different levels). In addition, the diffusion of best practices is very important for the work of the CSD. In a review year, for example, presentations with best practices complement the CSD discussions that try to evaluate the progress that is made with regard to some previously defined issues (e.g. Van den Brande, 2009b, p. 22). Finally, delegations consider their presence at the CSD sessions very useful because they can network with other delegations (Van den Brande, 2009b, p. 26).

At the global level, sustainable development is also discussed by industrialized countries in the OECD. Sustainable development first came on the OECD agenda in 1997, after its importance had been emphasized by the High-Level Advisory Group on the Environment, which was convened by the Secretary-General (Eppel, 1999, p. 41; OECD, 2009). From then on, it has been discussed in the OECD within various formats with different mandates. The current format is the Annual Meeting of Sustainable Development Experts (AMSDE),<sup>9</sup> which aims to monitor how sustainable development is integrated in the work of the OECD and publishes its results in annual report (e.g. OECD, 2008a). In addition, it aims to recommend

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<sup>8</sup> Since 2004, the agenda of the CSD is planned on the basis two-yearly cycles. Each cycle consists of one review session (in the first year) and one policy session (in the second year) (Van den Brande, 2009b, p. 10).

<sup>9</sup> The previous formats were a Horizontal Programme on Sustainable Development (1998-2001) and an Ad Hoc Group on Sustainable Development (2001-2004) (OECD, 2009). In the OECD, sustainable development issues are also discussed within the Round Table on Sustainable Development (established in 1998) (OECD, 2008d). Since this is an informal setting, we will not discuss it.

cross-cutting priority areas with regard to sustainable development to the OECD Ministerial Council, to cooperate with other international organizations, such as the CSD (e.g. OECD, 2008b), and to share best practices on sustainable development strategies in the OECD member states (AMSDE 2009; OECD, 2008c; 2009). Considering the various recommendations, guidelines and background notes it publishes on the subject (e.g. OECD, 2001; OECD, 2002; 2007; OECD and UNDP, 2002), it could be assumed that the OECD, a prime example of an “ideas-mongering institution” (Rose, 1993, p. 69, see also Marcussen, 2004, p. 112), might play a role in diffusing similar sustainable development policies through transnational communication.

Finally, we also want to pay attention to sustainable development discussions at the regional level. The EU is a prime example of a regional organization with an own sustainable development policy (Pallemmaerts and Azmanova, 2006). Moreover, it plays an active role in the global discussions on sustainable development in the CSD and the AMSDE.<sup>10</sup> The recognition of the concept of sustainable development in the EU did not immediately follow Brundtland or Rio (Pallemmaerts, 2006, p. 20-21). Sustainable development was adopted as an objective in 1997 (Treaty of Amsterdam). In reaction to the Rio +5 Summit, the EU decided in 1999 to develop a sustainable development strategy in preparation of the WSSD in 2002 (Tanasescu, 2006, p. 54). The EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) was adopted by the Gothenburg Council in 2001 (Pallemmaerts, 2006). It proposes actions in six priority fields<sup>11</sup> (European Commission, 2002). In 2006, the European Council adopted a renewed EU SDS with seven key challenges<sup>12</sup> (Council of the European Union, 2006). At the time of writing, discussions about a new revision are ongoing. Although its relationship with other EU strategies, such as the main socio-economic strategy (i.e. the current Lisbon Strategy and its successor Europe 2020), is only vaguely described, the EU SDS aims to offer a framework for promoting the overarching and long-term objective of sustainable development (European Commission, 2009, p. 13). Generally spoken, the sustainable development activities of the EU can be characterized as policy-making and do not belong to the EU's legislative work. For many policy issues, the EU can directly influence the (sub)national policies of its 27 member states by using legally binding legislation (e.g. regulations and directives). However, as a ‘meta-policy’ (not considering the different sectoral policies that could be seen as its components), the EU's sustainable development policy largely relies on soft law measures that the EU has at its disposal, e.g. Commission communications, Council conclusions, or procedures similar to the Open Method of Coordination (Kraemer et al., 2003; Spangenberg, 2010, p. 131; von Homeyer, 2002, p. 295, 297). Nevertheless, the EU SDS does contain concrete recommendations for the member states, e.g. to appoint a EU SDS representative (§37), to complete a national sustainable development strategy by June 2007 and to take into account

<sup>10</sup> This finding follows from a non-participatory observation by the second co-author as a member of the Belgian delegation to the CSD and the AMSDE.

<sup>11</sup> These are combating poverty and social exclusion; dealing with the economic and social implication of an ageing society; limiting CC and increase use of clean energy; addressing threats to public health; managing natural resources more responsibly; and improving the transport system and land-use management.

<sup>12</sup> The renewed key challenges are climate change and clean energy; sustainable transport; sustainable consumption and production; conservation and management of natural resources; public health; social inclusion, demography and migration; and global poverty and sustainable development challenges.

the revised EU SDS for future reviews of the national strategy (§40) (Council of the European Union, 2006). Influences on lower levels can thus be expected.

## 4. Methodology

Previous analyses account for a high relevance of transnational communication in processes of policy transfer, e.g. in environmental policy (Holzinger et al., 2008). Many of those policy transfer studies apply a large-N quantitative research method. Such a method is appropriate for assessing the relevance of different factors of policy transfer. However, we still have limited knowledge about how policy transfer, including through transnational communication, exactly takes place within cases (see also Holzinger and Knill, 2008, p. 403). An in-depth analysis of the different mechanisms of transnational communication requires another methodology. That is why we opt for a comparative case study design. Through a detailed comparison of a small number of cases, an in-depth analysis of the process of transnational communication becomes possible. Such a qualitative analysis goes further than many policy transfer analyses, which do not go beyond the identification of the *presence* of a certain policy (e.g. is there a sustainable development strategy or not?), while we want to investigate the *content* of those policies as well. In addition, a qualitative comparison of a small number of cases allows the consideration of the contextual features of the policies (Bennett, 2004, p. 34). Attention to the domestic policy content gives an indication of the reasons why certain aspects have been influenced by international dynamics. A comparative case study design can thus be used to uncover other factors which might explain the nature of the influence of international policy (Mahoney, 2007, p. 125-126). Finally, a qualitative method is more appropriate for the type of exploratory research we intend to do here, since the theoretical framework we presented has not yet been extensively applied to subnational governments and sustainable development.

We compare three subnational governments from different OECD countries: Quebec (Canada), North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) and Flanders (Belgium). Although they have a varying degree of autonomy (see Hooghe et al., 2008), they all have legislative powers and a sufficiently large share of competences that allows them to conduct their own sustainable development policy. The fact that two cases operate in an EU context, while Quebec does not, allows to control the importance of the EU in the policy transfer process. The empirical material of the analysis is distilled from an extensive analysis of policy documents, parliamentary reports and secondary literature, and from a large amount of interviews. The list of interviewees can be found at the end of this paper.

## 5. Analysis

The three case studies start with a brief discussion of the subnational governments' involvement in multilateral decision-making for sustainable development. The rest of the analysis is guided by our two research questions. First, does the subnational government have a sustainable development policy and, if so, has it been triggered by international developments? We identify the presence of a sustainable development policy by a high-level executive decision made by the government to institutionalize sustainable development in its policy-making. Second, is the content of the government's sustainable development policy shaped by international policy-making? A *governmental policy* is understood as an intentional course of action or inaction designed by governmental bodies and officials, that consists of a set of interrelated decisions concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them, in dealing with a problem or matter of concern (Adolino and Blake, 2001, p. 10; Howlett and



Ramesh, 2003, p. 5-8). *Policy content* comprises policy goals and policy instruments. We will thus focus on the goals each government selects for its sustainable development policy and on the specific instruments it designs to attain those goals. The three mechanisms of transnational communication serve as an analytical lens, but they will not be discussed separately in the case studies. In a final part of the analysis, comparative patterns regarding the three mechanisms are displayed.

## 5.1 Quebec

The Canadian province of Quebec is one of the most visible non-state actors on the international scene (Michaud, 2009, p. 185). The development of international relations has traditionally been an important element of Quebec's identity-building (Paquin, 2005, p. 133). That includes the involvement in multilateral decision-making; the UN-led process on sustainable development is no exception. The Quebec government actively supported the activities of the Brundtland Commission, e.g. by financing the first official French translation of the Brundtland Report. Quebec has been present at and provided input for both the Rio and Johannesburg Summits and it is involved in the yearly CSD sessions. Quebec governments, whether Liberal or sovereigntist, adhere to the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine, which states that Quebec's constitutional competences extend to the international area (Paquin, 2010). The exercise of this doctrine, however, is not recognized by the federal government. In Canada, provinces have little guaranteed access to multilateral decision-making. In Canadian delegations to multilateral meetings, they receive the same treatment as participating NGOs. Besides being involved through 'intra-state' routes (see Van den Brande, 2009b, p. 6-8), Quebec is also very active in different transnational networks of subnational governments, such as The New England Governors & The Eastern Canadian Premiers, or The Climate Group's States and Regions Alliance. In addition, Quebec is an important partner of the different international organizations associated with the Francophonie (Paquin, 2004, p. 217).

In 2007, the government of Quebec adopted its first sustainable development strategy. That resulted from a commitment to institutionalize sustainable development, made in 2003. But sustainable development has been on the agenda in Quebec since the 1980s. Indeed, the process leading up to the adoption of the strategy was a long one, in which many factors, including international impulses, intervened. In 1988 the Quebec government was the first in Canada to create a Round Table on Environment and Economy. The Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers recommended the establishment of such round tables, after a visit of the Brundtland Commission to Canada in 1986 (Toner, 2000, p. 58; Toner and Meadowcroft, 2009, p. 84). The Round Table had the task of making the idea of sustainable development concrete for Quebec. In the same context, a sustainable development unit was established within the Environment Ministry. In 1992, the government created the Interministerial Committee on Sustainable Development, a horizontal coordination body which represents all departments at director-general level and is chaired by the Environment Ministry. Those small steps, to a large extent triggered by the activities of the Brundtland Commission, laid the foundation for the institutionalization of sustainable development in Quebec. In 1992, Quebec participated at the Rio Summit and formally committed itself to the principles of the Rio Declaration and to the goals of Agenda 21. During the period of the sovereigntist governments (between 1994 and 2003) no major decisions regarding sustainable

development were taken by the government,<sup>13</sup> although the issue remained on the agenda and many reports for international meetings were made, e.g. for Rio +5. Quebec also participated at the Johannesburg Summit, but we did not find any concrete impact of that summit. The major event triggering the final institutionalization phase of sustainable development was the return to power of the Liberals in 2003. The new Prime Minister Charest was a former federal Environment Minister. Having been responsible for an initiative at federal level to launch a multistakeholder<sup>14</sup> partnership for sustainable development in keeping with the Rio commitments, Charest ordered his own Environment Minister in 2003 to launch a similar 'green plan' in Quebec. The idea to do so formed part of the Liberals' election programme (PLQ 2002, p. 24). The Environment Ministry turned it into a sustainable development plan, which was presented for public consultation together with an ambitious sustainable development act in 2004. The current existence of a sustainable development strategy and the related institutions is thus a consequence of the election of the Liberals in 2003. However, many important foundations were already in place, such as the Interministerial Committee and the expertise built up by the administration in preparing important multilateral meetings. Those foundations were all stimulated by international events, most importantly the Rio Summit and the activities of the Brundtland Commission. The existence of a sustainable development policy in Quebec is thus to a large extent triggered by international policy-making.

Turning now to policy content, the most important documents outlining the Quebec sustainable development policy are the Sustainable Development Act (Assemblée Nationale, 2006) and the first sustainable development strategy (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007b). The main objective of the effort is to provide the public administration of Quebec with a new framework so as to bring the entirety of Quebec's policy and decision-making in agreement with sustainable development. The Act talks of a necessary curve that the society of Quebec needs to make with regard to non sustainable patterns of development. The definition of sustainable development used in the Act is the Brundtland one, supplemented by a reference to the three dimensions stemming from Rio. But more importantly, the Act defines sixteen principles which need to be taken into account by the administration to integrate sustainable development into policy and decision-making. The principles are said to be Quebec's response to the 27 principles enshrined in the Rio Declaration (Gouvernement du Québec, 2004: 21). Indeed, ten of the sixteen principles bear very close resemblance to the Rio principles, while six others appear to have been added to accommodate domestic priorities, e.g. subsidiarity or protection of cultural heritage. The Act is intended as the legal framework of the Quebec sustainable development policy, while the sustainable development strategy should provide more concrete goals. The current strategy is valid until 2013. It formulates three main challenges: to develop knowledge, to promote responsible action, and to foster commitment. While the Act is applauded for its ambitions, observers and interviewees often perceive the

<sup>13</sup> An exception is the creation of the Quebec Action Fund for Sustainable Development (*Fonds d'action québécois pour le développement durable*) by the sovereigntist government in 2000, as a result of a budget surplus. The fund evolved into an association without lucrative purpose that funds projects aimed at promoting behavioural change for sustainable development.

<sup>14</sup> Launched after Rio in 1994, Charest's *Projet de Société* was intended to transform the existing Green Plan of the conservative federal government into a full-blown strategy for sustainable development, but the process failed after the disappearance of political momentum and because of organizational difficulties (Tarasofsky, 2007, p. 6; Toner, 2000, p. 61-62). As a reference to Charest's federal experience, the 2007 Quebec sustainable development strategy is surtitled *Un projet de société pour le Québec*.

strategy as a weak and vague execution of it.<sup>15</sup> The strategy contains a set of 29 policy goals, which are structured around nine themes. While the logic behind the definition of the themes is said to be opaque (Gendron et al., 2007, p. 42), they all relate to issues that were discussed in Rio, although no explicit link is made. Apart from some brief references to the OECD and to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, the policy goals mostly focus on the domestic context of Quebec. Moreover, the 29 policy goals of the strategy are further operationalized by the sustainable development action plans that about 150 departments and public organisms had to issue in 2009. As a result, the Quebec sustainable development policy consists of 1 143 concrete actions (Gouvernement du Québec, 2009, p. 15), which makes it a rather puzzling lot.

With regard to the design of the set of policy instruments for sustainable development, the policy discourse frequently emphasizes that Quebec's approach was distilled from foreign experiences (e.g. Gouvernement du Québec, 2004, p. 12). Interviews with both political and administrative officials confirm this. The major sources for lesson-drawing were other Canadian provinces (e.g. Manitoba, which has also institutionalized sustainable development), countries (including the Canadian federal government), and international organizations such as the UN and the OECD. The governance model designed by Quebec resembles the model that exists at the federal level in Canada since 1995 (see also Happaerts, 2010, p. 23-24), e.g. the creation of a Sustainable Development Commissioner within the office of the Auditor General of Quebec.<sup>16</sup> Yet Quebec also seems to have learned from the weaknesses of the federal model, e.g. by introducing a legal basis and developing a government-wide strategy before demanding departmental action plans. In contrast to the federal model, Quebec has established many instruments aimed at capacity-building and at strengthened coordination within the government. Examples include the Sustainable Development Coordination Bureau (within the Environment Ministry), the network of about 135 sustainable development officers of each public organism, and the Interministerial Committee (cf. *supra*). Quebec is also very proud to be among the very few governments that have passed a sustainable development act. This fits in the prominent discourse on leadership of the Quebec government. With regard to sustainable development and related issues such as climate change, Quebec is increasingly profiling itself as a leader in North America and as an example to learn from (e.g. Gouvernement du Québec, 2004, p. 6; 2006, p. 1). The most recent instrument of the sustainable development policy is a set of indicators meant to monitor Quebec's progress toward sustainable development. In the search for those indicators a study was made comparing 36 existing sets of indicators for sustainable development abroad (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007a), which offers an interesting example of the lesson-drawing that took place. Quebec looked at other Canadian provinces, several OECD countries and some international organizations, but interviews reveal that most inspiration was gathered from the work on

<sup>15</sup> The themes are: inform, make aware, educate, innovate; reduce and manage risks to improve health, safety and the environment; produce and consume responsibly; increase economic efficiency; address demographic changes; practice integrated, sustainable land use and development; preserve and share the collective heritage; promote social involvement; and prevent and reduce social and economic inequality.

<sup>16</sup> The Commissioner and his team audit the government with regard to sustainable development and report to parliament on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Act, including on the compliance of the sustainable development principles. At the federal level, a Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development was created in 1995 within the office of the Auditor General of Canada.

indicators by the OECD and by the EU (Eurostat). This is a remarkable finding, since it shows that a government does not need to be a member of an international organization (in this case the EU<sup>17</sup>) in order to be influenced by it. That type of influence is not captured by statistical studies on policy transfer, in which the membership to an international organization is usually one of the major variables.

The analysis suggests that to a certain extent Quebec acts like a nation-state, e.g. by formally committing to the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 as if it were a full-fledged UN member state. Its discourse shows that it wants to be a leading “state” in North America with regard to sustainable development. In Quebec’s answer to the international sustainable development debate, it is clear that international influences have been crucial. The foundations for its sustainable development policy were put in place as a concrete result of Brundtland and Rio. Quebec has learned from policy models promoted by international organizations and has drawn lessons from other governments. The government, however, always emphasizes that it wants to do better than others and that it wants to emerge as a leader. The fact that international processes were able to influence the policy content is facilitated, as interviews confirm, by the fact that Quebec has been involved in multilateral decision-making on sustainable development since the 1980s. But international influences seem less tangible at the level of concrete goals and instruments, rather than at the more strategic level (e.g. the definition and principles enshrined in the Act).

## 5.2 North Rhine-Westphalia

The German *Länder* (states) have considerable constitutional rights to develop an autonomous external policy. Insofar as they have legislative competences in a certain policy area, they can even conclude treaties with other countries, but those are always subject to federal approval (Blatter et al., 2008, p. 471-472). The *Länder* are among the most active subnational governments in Europe in promoting their economic and cultural interests abroad. But since they do not have a strong regional identity—as opposed to entities such as Quebec, Flanders or the Basque Country—their interest in developing a specifically separate (i.e. extra-state) diplomacy is likely to be limited. However, given their high degree of ‘shared rule’ (Happaerts, 2010, p. 13), North Rhine-Westphalia and the other *Länder* have considerable access to the German external policy. For instance, they represent Germany in the EU Council of Ministers when *Länder* competences are at stake (Jeffery, 2005, p. 36-37). For global environmental policy, an agreement<sup>18</sup> exists that two *Länder* can be included in federal delegations to multilateral meetings. Especially the larger *Länder*, such as Bavaria or North Rhine-Westphalia, are interested in such participation. That is how North Rhine-Westphalian representatives were present at the Rio and Johannesburg Summits. The *Land* is also often present at the yearly CSD sessions.

As opposed to what has been observed in some other countries such as Canada, the Brundtland Report did not bring about many concrete initiatives in Germany (Jänicke et al.,

<sup>17</sup> Also other examples of the EU’s influence on Quebec can be found. For instance, in a reference to the EU’s climate package, Quebec has recently fixed the target of a 20% reduction of greenhouse gases by 2020 (Québec International, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> The representation of the *Länder* in those cases is decided in the Conference of Environment Ministers (*Umweltministerkonferenz*), one of the many intergovernmental coordination mechanisms of German federalism. According to an informal agreement, one *Land* with a Christian Democrat led government and one with a Social Democrat led government can be represented.

2001, p. 7), neither at the federal nor at the subnational level. Kern (2008, p. 125) argues that the sustainable development initiatives launched in the *Länder* draw on three different concepts: Agenda 21, global governance, and so-called 'new environmental policy instruments'. North Rhine-Westphalia is among the first group, since its government in 2000 decided to institutionalize sustainable development by launching an Agenda 21 process. Much like in other *Länder* (Jänicke et al., 2001, p. 19), that institutionalization process was stimulated by Rio and by bottom-up initiatives. While the Rio Summit did not generate any immediate governmental action in North Rhine-Westphalia, it did stir up ideas for NGOs, municipalities, and members of parliament. It brought the North Rhine-Westphalian based Wuppertal Institute, along with two NGOs, to publish the authoritative report *Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland* about the pursuit of sustainable development in Germany (BUND and Misereor, 1996). Rio also encouraged many municipalities to develop a Local Agenda 21, more so in North Rhine-Westphalia than in most other *Länder* (Kern et al., 2007, p. 609-610). A horizontal agency was established to support all Local Agenda 21 initiatives in the *Land*. Those bottom-up initiatives fuelled by Rio sowed the seeds of the institutionalization of sustainable development in North Rhine-Westphalia, but its concretization needed a dose of political will. In 1995, the Social Democrats, who had headed three consecutive absolute majorities, formed a coalition with the Green party. The Greens were led by Environment Minister Höhn who, having been present in Rio as a member of a parliamentary delegation, intended to translate Rio into concrete policy-making. During the first coalition period the Greens supported many Agenda-related bottom-up initiatives, but were unable to launch a *Land*-wide process due to many political disagreements with their senior coalition partner. However, during the same period the Social Democrat Minister-president did announce the government's intention to launch an Agenda 21 process, or an environmental pact,<sup>19</sup> in a declaration to parliament. This triggered parliamentary debates about Agenda 21. During the negotiations for a second red-green coalition in 2000, the Greens achieved what they could not before, and Agenda 21 North Rhine-Westphalia was formally inscribed in the coalition agreement (SPD and Die Grünen, 2000, p. 29-30), marking the official starting point of the Agenda 21 process. It could thus be stated that Rio gave important impulses for sustainable development to be institutionalized in North Rhine-Westphalia, but domestic political dynamics were the decisive factor.

When turning to the policy content of the Agenda 21 process conducted between 2000 and 2005 (called *Agenda 21 North Rhine-Westphalia*), it is important to first certify the actual status and goal of the process itself. Indeed, that status has undergone a negative evolution. Before the official start, a parliamentary decision requested the government to start up "an Agenda 21 North Rhine-Westphalia as a strategy for sustainable development" (Landtag Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1998, p. 3). Later, Minister Höhn indicated that a pilot phase was needed before a strategy could start in 2000. Eventually, however, the Agenda 21 process conducted after 2000 did not outgrow the preparatory phase. In fact, it could be considered as an extensive consultation process set around a number of themes in a participatory manner, that laid the foundations (in the form of policy recommendations) for a true sustainable development strategy. The goal of the process was to come up with a concrete idea of what a sustainable development policy would mean in North Rhine-Westphalia and what its concrete objectives

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This was a reference to Bavaria's *Umweltpakt*, a negotiated agreement between the government and the business sector. Meant as a tool for environmental policy integration, it was initiated by the Christian Democrat government in 1995 and has often been used as an object of lesson-drawing (Jørgensen, 2007, p. 149). During the debates in North Rhine-Westphalia before 2000, the Christian Democrat opposition frequently incited the government to launch a similar 'environmental pact'.

should be. According to interviewees, the fact that the process failed to grow into a real strategy before 2005 was due to the little support it received from the Social Democrats. Other official policy goals of Agenda 21 North Rhine-Westphalia were to embed the idea of sustainable development into society, to mobilize relevant partners, and to achieve real changes through concrete projects. Moreover, the entirety of governmental policy should contribute to sustainable development (MUNLV 2005, p. 6). The applied definition of sustainable development was inspired by Brundtland and Rio, focusing on intergenerational solidarity, on the three dimensions of sustainable development and on participation (MUNLV 2005, p. 1). The six themes around which the process was centred all relate to chapters included in Rio's Agenda 21, but no reference is made.<sup>20</sup>

After the Agenda 21 process was included in the coalition agreement, the first instruments were created in 2001. An Agenda 21 Bureau was established within the Environment Ministry, which took the lead of the entire process soon after it started. To ensure coordination within the government, a State Secretary Committee for Sustainable Development was set up. Moreover, the government established a multistakeholder body, the Future Council, characterized by a unique membership that brought together prominent personalities from the academic world, business, churches, culture and sports, among others. Its aim was to develop a long-term vision for North Rhine-Westphalia to achieve in 2030 (State of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2004). The focus of the Agenda 21 process was soon oriented towards the concrete projects and networks that were set up in 2002 with the aim of embedding sustainable development within society. In the same period, North Rhine-Westphalia participated at the Johannesburg Summit. That did not seem to have a concrete impact on the process at home, firstly because at that time the major decisions had already been made, and secondly because the Green Minister invested her resources at the Summit in development cooperation, which was newly added to her portfolio. That might also explain why North Rhine-Westphalia did not take part in the Gauteng initiative, even though it did become a member of nrg4SD afterwards (Happaerts et al., 2010). The final piece of the Agenda 21 process was a large closing conference in 2003, where for each of the selected themes mission statements, goals and indicators were presented (MUNLV 2003). Afterwards, both the Future Council and the government issued a final report, which were meant to be the building blocks for a future sustainable development strategy (MUNLV 2005; State of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2004). For each of the themes, the government's end report contains recommendations for a future strategy. Yet more concrete policy instruments were never established.

The international influence on the policy content seems to have been minimal. While the idea of 'bringing Rio home' is prevalent, references to Brundtland<sup>21</sup> or Johannesburg are not found. The EU SDS did not seem to have had any impact either, which is partly explained by the fact that it was issued when the important decisions in Düsseldorf had already been made, but it could also be due to a general German culture of not according a large role to the EU unless very specific policy issues are at stake (Niestroy, 2005, p. 152-153). References to the federal government are more frequent, especially after 1998 when the red-green coalition was

<sup>20</sup> The themes were climate protection and sustainable mobility, sustainable economics, human settlement and natural spaces, consumer protection and health, global responsibility in the one world, and social policy. Toward the end of the process, education, culture and sports was added as a seventh theme.

<sup>21</sup> In contrast, references to another famous world commission abound, i.e. the one on international development issues headed by former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt (e.g. MUNLV 2005, p. 1)

mirrored at the federal level. Concrete lesson-drawing from the federal government could not take place, since the process in Düsseldorf preceded the process in Berlin. Yet interviews suggest that for the design of the Agenda 21 process, Minister Höhn was inspired by the Wuppertal Institute's publication (cf. *supra*). Moreover, in some documents very general references to other countries, e.g. the Netherlands, are found. The unique composition of the Future Council, however, was said to be "without predecessor" (MUNLV 2005, p. 9). A final remark concerns the follow-up of Agenda 21 North Rhine-Westphalia. In 2005, the red-green coalition was replaced by a black-yellow coalition led by the Christian Democrats who had been in opposition for 40 years. The institutions and outcomes of the Agenda 21 process, identified as 'green fiddling', were not revived. The institutionalization of Agenda 21 thus appeared too weak to survive a major political turnover. While some themes (e.g. land use) still play an important role within the current government's policy, the overarching idea of sustainable development, which was explicitly present in the Agenda 21 period, is largely left aside. Moreover, the policy instruments shifted from a strong emphasis on broad participation and bottom-up societal projects, to targeted cooperation between government and specific stakeholders on selected policy issues. An example is the *Dialog Wirtschaft und Umwelt*, in which the Environment and Economy Ministries coordinate with industry representatives (MUNLV 2009), which makes it similar, albeit in a more modest version, to the environmental pact the Christian Democrats were referring to before 2000.

### 5.3 Flanders

When looking at the external policy-making capacities of subnational governments, the Belgian *gewesten* (regions) and *gemeenschappen* (communities) are often considered as being unique (Paquin, 2010). According to the 'in foro interno, in foro externo' principle, which was part of a 1993 state reform, the Belgian subnational governments are permitted to carry out an external policy for those policy subjects for which they are internally competent. That implies, for example, that they can take part in the national delegation to international negotiations (Van den Brande, 2009a, p. 13). The federal and subnational governments of Belgium have signed various cooperation agreements with regard to international decision-making, e.g. on the representation of Belgium in international organizations and in the EU Council of Ministers (Belgisch Staatsblad, 1994a; b). The first signs of involvement of the government of Flanders<sup>22</sup> in international decision-making for sustainable development can be traced back to the mid-90s. Since then a division within the Environment Ministry has been following the international negotiations on sustainable development. That includes taking part in the national coordination meetings in preparation of international negotiations (e.g. in the EU, the OECD and the CSD) and attending those international meetings as part of the Belgian delegation. Flanders was actively involved in the Johannesburg Summit and it has been participating in the decision-making process on the EU SDS. Yet, although the Flemish government has large constitutional access through national decision-making, it has also been active in searching for extra-state routes to multilateral decision-making for sustainable development, e.g. by co-founding nrg4SD (Happaerts et al., 2010).

The institutionalization of sustainable development in Flanders is marked by the 2004 decision to assign sustainable development to the responsibilities of the Minister-President.

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The Flemish government jointly manages the competences of the Flemish Region and the Flemish Community.

That decision was part of a reorganization process of the Flemish administration in which many horizontal policy issues were centralized with the Minister-President. It put an end to a decade in which sustainable development was a matter of the Environment Ministry alone. There has been no direct influence of the Rio Summit on Flemish policy, presumably because Flanders could at that time not yet conduct an autonomous external policy. Yet from the mid-90s, the large constitutional access of Flanders led to a high level of involvement in various international decision-making settings for sustainable development. Between 2001 and 2002, three international developments triggered the institutionalization of a Flemish sustainable development policy, i.e. the negotiations on the first EU SDS, the EU preparations of the Johannesburg Summit and the Johannesburg Summit itself. The first two are linked to the Belgian Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2001 (see Vincke et al., 2008, p. 20). As future President, Belgium was closely involved in the negotiations on the first EU SDS and on the EU position for the first Preparatory Committee of the Johannesburg Summit (April/May 2001). During its Presidency, Belgium had to preside a large part of the preparatory negotiations on the EU position for the second Preparatory Committee of the Johannesburg Summit (January/February 2002). In the EU those negotiations took place in the Environment Council, where at that time a subnational minister could be present to assist the Belgian federal minister.<sup>23</sup> Yet during the Presidency, the subnational ministers were permitted to sit on the Belgian chair, since the federal representative already occupied the Presidency chair. Making use of these opportunities, Flanders was at the front row when Johannesburg was discussed among EU member states. At the Johannesburg Summit itself, a large Flemish delegation (including the Environment Minister) was present, and Flemish officials were among the initiators of the Gauteng conference. The momentum created by the Johannesburg Summit (and by the developments at the EU level) resulted in a positive attitude towards the establishment of a sustainable development policy in Flanders. Concretely, in 2003 Flemish officials launched the initiative to start an informal working group on sustainable development within the Flemish administration, partly to coordinate international sustainable development activities. The institutionalization of sustainable development in Flanders is thus directly triggered by international developments, especially by the momentum of the Johannesburg Summit. Yet an intervening factor was the composition of the ruling coalition, which between 1999 and 2004 included the Green party.<sup>24</sup> The Greens, who delivered the Environment Minister, attached particular importance to the sustainable development agenda. That is why the concept had a prominent place in the 1999 coalition agreement (Vlaamse Regering, 1999) and why many resources were invested in the active participation at the Johannesburg Summit.

The question now arises whether the content of the Flemish sustainable development policy has also been shaped by international developments. The policy goals are laid out in two key documents, i.e. the Flemish Sustainable Development Strategy (phase 1, approved in 2006) and the Flemish decree on sustainable development (2008). While the strategy results from the

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This follows from the Cooperation Agreement of 1994 for the representation of Belgium in the EU Council of Ministers, which stated that a federal minister could be assisted by a subnational minister as assessor (Belgisch Staatsblad 1994b). Since 2003, it is a subnational minister who occupies the Belgian seat, assisted by a federal assessor (Belgisch Staatsblad 2003).

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The 1999-2004 coalition was composed by the Liberals, the Social Democrats, the Green party and a Flemish nationalist party. Before 1999 and after 2004, the Flemish government has been ruled by coalitions of different colour, but always led by the Christian Democrats and excluding the Green party.



intention of the Flemish Government to make sustainable development an inherent part of its policy (Vlaamse Regering, 2007), the decree wants to lay down a legal framework for the coordination of the Flemish sustainable development policy and to ensure its continuity (Vlaams Parlement, 2008). Both describe sustainable development by focusing on the Brundtland definition. In addition, they emphasize that sustainable development has four pillars. Those are the three traditional dimensions plus a process dimension that focuses on the societal change that is needed to achieve sustainable development. It also wants to give particular attention to five policy principles<sup>25</sup> that follow from the 27 principles of the Rio Declaration. In order to achieve sustainable development, the Flemish government gives priority to seven themes that refer to the themes distinguished in the first EU SDS.<sup>26</sup> For each theme, the strategy indicates a long-term view, one or more long-term goals and various strategic short-term goals (with a total of around 45). The strategy clearly indicates that the goals are based on existing international and Flemish commitments, resulting from UN and EU meetings, and from Flemish policy documents such as the 2001 *Pact of Vilvoorde* with socio-economic partners and civil society. A closer look at the different goals reveals that almost only the long-term goals are based on international agreements, while the short-term goals are largely based on existing Flemish commitments. It was an explicit choice of the government not to impose additional policy goals. In general, it is interesting to note that the strategy as well as the decree underline the importance of the international context and refer to international commitments. This is also the case for the two policy notes on sustainable development written by the Flemish Minister-president (Leterme, 2004; Peeters, 2009). In sum, international summits and EU documents seem to play a significant role in offering a general framework for the Flemish sustainable development policy. However, when it comes to concrete and short-term goals, international developments do not appear to have a substantive impact.

With regard to policy instruments, less than one year after the allocation of sustainable development to the responsibility of the Minister-president, a small coordination team was established within the Minister-president's administration. That team was assigned to preside the interdepartmental working group on sustainable development, that was from then on formalized and comprised a representative of each policy domain. One of the first tasks of the unit and of the working group was to prepare the drafting of a Flemish sustainable development strategy. The intention to draw-up a strategy directly followed from signing the Gauteng Declaration. In addition, the call to draw-up a national strategy in the outcome documents of Rio and Johannesburg and in the EU SDS contributed to the formulation of a Flemish strategy. In 2006 the Minister-President issued the first phase of the Flemish sustainable development strategy, which is mainly a framework text laying out strategic objectives and displaying the institutional steps to further anchor sustainable development. The second phase of the strategy consists of a series of twelve operational projects, which have only in 2009 been approved. Those projects are also connected to a certain amount of subsidies to be allocated by the coordination team. Of all projects, the Flemish government

<sup>25</sup> The five policy principles that receive particular attention are: common but differentiated responsibility, double equity, integration, precaution and participation.

<sup>26</sup> The themes of the Flemish strategy are: poverty and social exclusion; ageing society; climate change and clean energy; transport; land-use management; management of natural resources; and public health. The only difference with the themes of the first EU SDS is their grouping and numbering. In addition, particular attention is given to horizontal themes, such as equal opportunities, innovation and education.

currently focuses most of its attention on sustainable building and living, on sustainable governmental spending and on education for sustainable development (as a response to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development) (Peeters, 2009, p. 24-25). Next to drafting the strategy, the coordination team and the interdepartmental working group were also assigned to prepare a Flemish position for international negotiations on sustainable development. While in the first few years after the reallocation, because of an informal agreement, the Environment administration still participated in the international negotiations on sustainable development, recently a shift can be noted. The coordination team is steadily strengthening its follow-up of international decision-making (e.g. by sending staff to international meetings). Yet, because of the acquired expertise and institutional memory with regard to international sustainable development issues, the Environment administration still seems to play the most important role. Furthermore, the Flemish sustainable development policy has an own budget since 2006, which it uses *inter alia* to subsidize the operational projects of the strategy and to finance an academic policy research centre for sustainable development (2007-2011). It has also developed two reports (2006 and 2008) with indicators on sustainable development borrowed from Eurostat. Surprisingly, however, those indicators are not related to the themes or goals of the strategy. Since mid-2008, Flanders has a legal basis for sustainable development in the form of a decree. The decree anchors the governance model for sustainable development. The Flemish sustainable development policy is to be inclusive, coordinated and participatory, which implies that the individual ministers are in charge of integrating sustainable development within their own policy areas and that only minimal coordination is provided (Spillemaeckers and Bachus, 2009). In order to institutionalize its sustainable development policy, it seems that Flanders to a large extent relied on the results of an academic study that was published at the end of 2004 (Bachus et al., 2004). In addition, influence is noticeable from international developments, though mainly for framing the Flemish sustainable development policy and not really for shaping the content of the policy.

In conclusion, the constitutional access Flanders enjoys, and applies, to participate in multilateral decision-making for sustainable development, brings alone a certain kind of positive and open attitude towards international developments. Generally spoken, most influence follows from the Johannesburg Summit and from EU documents. The Flemish government is usually very receptive for EU policy and decision-making. Interviews also show that EU legislation is usually welcomed to facilitate a consensus in national negotiations between the federal and the subnational governments. Summits like Rio and Johannesburg are often considered to offer useful frameworks for developing policy. OECD discussions are in general highly appreciated in Flanders because of the usefulness of their outcome documents and for networking. However, when it comes to sustainable development, the OECD discussions seem to have had no direct influence on the Flemish sustainable development policy.

#### **5.4 Transnational communication: comparative patterns**

Looking at the promotion of policy models by international organizations, it is clear that international developments have played a key role in triggering sustainable development policies in all three subnational governments. An interesting finding is that the governments' involvement in international decision-making is decisive. It explains why Brundtland has impacted Quebec, why Rio has influenced North Rhine-Westphalia and why Flanders has been

affected only by Johannesburg. Yet besides international influence, the presence of political will is a necessary condition for sustainable development to truly gain ground. In all of our cases the presence and capacity of a certain political actor was proved essential. The attitude of the subnational governments towards international policy-making is also decisive. Especially in the cases of subnational governments with a strong identity, international organizations and events produce legitimacy pressures. That is why Quebec and Flanders have issued a sustainable development strategy, a typical *national* instrument demanded by global and regional organizations, and iterated for subnational governments by the Gauteng Declaration. In North Rhine-Westphalia, in contrast, much more emphasis is laid on the idea that the Agenda 21, which is rather a *local* instrument, sprouted from bottom-up initiatives instead of from top-down commitments. While international events have largely triggered the subnational initiatives, their influence on the policy content is less uniform. We notice the largest impact in Quebec, where the will to emerge as a leader has pushed the government to learn from international policy models and best practices. In Flanders international policy-making only has a framing role. Especially the EU, which in Belgium traditionally has a strong normative power, is considered important. In North Rhine-Westphalia international impact on policy content seems minimal, possibly because of the absence of international legitimacy pressures.

The two other mechanisms of transnational communication (policy copying and networking) appear less relevant. Only in Quebec a genuine effort is observed to draw lessons from other governments. In North Rhine-Westphalia references are made to the experiences of other *Länder* (e.g. Bavaria), only to state that North Rhine-Westphalia wants to do something different. The Flemish case shows no tangible findings of lesson-drawing. With regard to networks, finally, a high involvement in networking activities is observed in all three cases, but influence on policy content has not taken place. It appears that subnational governments invest in such networks primarily to build contacts and to play a role in multilateral decision-making, but not with the intention to use them for the benefit of their internal policies.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper aimed at investigating whether sustainable development policies at the subnational level are triggered and shaped by international policy and decision-making. Our comparative analysis shows that international initiatives, especially the three milestones of Brundtland, Rio and Johannesburg, have definitely triggered the institutionalization of sustainable development at the subnational level. Yet international influence is not an absolute condition, a dose of political will is also needed. The role of international influences in shaping the content of sustainable development policies is less clear. While references to international developments are often made, the sustainable development policies of subnational governments are mostly shaped by domestic, and in some cases national, conditions. Even in the cases where the international influence seems strong, it mostly remains limited to a strategic level and diminishes when goals and policies become concrete.

Transnational communication has appeared to be a useful perspective to approach this topic. Yet because quantitative analyses do not explain why and how international influence takes place, sufficient attention must be paid to the contextual features of the analyzed policies if the research wants to go below the surface. However, even in a qualitative analysis, it remains hard to disentangle the different processes operating within a case, and the difference between references to international developments and true influences is hard to establish. Further research into this topic should analyze international factors in conjunction with other

factors that have appeared important in our analysis. While in some cases the national level constitutes a significant dynamic, in others a form of 'identity politics' needs to be taken into account. Moreover, in all cases political factors seem decisive. Further research could also include cases of subnational governments with a lower degree of autonomy (e.g. Dutch or French subnational governments), which were not considered in this paper.

While global policy documents on sustainable development largely ignore subnational governments, their message does resonate at the subnational level. Subnational governments feel concerned about global problems such as sustainable development and they respond to the international call for action. The largest resonance has come from the global summits of Rio and Johannesburg. Although their influence can be belated or indirect, their impact is real. This finding hints at the importance of the future Rio +20 Summit, for which negotiations are ongoing. Our cases also suggest that many sustainable development initiatives have known a certain weakening in the course of time, which is why a new momentum for sustainable development should be welcomed.

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## List of interviewees

### Quebec

Boisclair, André	11 May 2009	Minister of the Environment and Municipal Affairs (Parti québécois) at Government of Quebec (between 2001 and 2003)
Charest, Philippe	13 May 2009	senior policy adviser at Global Issues Branch; Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada; Government of Canada
Fournier, Maryse	13 May 2009	director at Direction of the Sustainable Development Commissioner; Auditor General of Quebec
Giguère, Serge	13 May 2009	principal director at Direction of the Sustainable Development Commissioner; Auditor General of Quebec
Jampierre, Véronique	12 May 2009	director general at Fonds d'action québécois pour le développement durable
Lacroix, Daniel	12 May 2009	director at International Organizations Division; Ministry of International Relations; Government of Quebec
Lambert, Janique	13 May 2009	director at Direction of the Sustainable Development Commissioner; Auditor General of Quebec
Lauzon, Robert	8 May 2009	director at Sustainable Development Coordination Bureau; Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks; Government of Quebec
Mead, Harvey	7 May 2009	Sustainable Development Commissioner at Auditor General of Quebec (between 2006 and 2007)

Mulcair, Thomas	5 May 2009	Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks (Parti libéral du Québec) at Government of Quebec (between 2003 and 2006)
Royer, Vincent	12 May 2009	climate change coordinator at International Organizations Division; Ministry of International Relations; Government of Quebec
Turgeon, Alexandre	13 May 2009	director general at Conseil régional de l'environnement et du développement durable – Capitale nationale

### North Rhine-Westphalia

Ellerbrock, Holger	1 April 2009	member of parliament (FDP) at Parliament of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Höhn, Bärbel	27 October 2009	Minister for Environment and Conservation, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (Die Grünen) at North Rhine-Westphalian Government (between 1995 and 2005)
Jansen, Dirk	30 January 2008	policy officer at BUND North Rhine-Westphalia (Friends of the Earth Germany)
Nagel, Bernd	31 March 2009	head of division at Bureaucracy Reduction, Economic Affairs and Environment Division; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Neugebohrn, Eberhard	2 April 2009	manager at Stiftung Umwelt und Entwicklung Nordrhein-Westfalen
Ortgies, Friedhelm	2 April 2009	member of parliament (CDU) at Parliament of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Rommel, Johannes	20 September 2007	member of parliament (Die Grünen) at Parliament of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Reuter, Klaus	30 March 2009	manager at Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Agenda 21 NRW
Schulze, Svenja	1 April 2009	member of parliament (SPD) at Parliament of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Stolper, Christoph	Ernst-30 January 2008	head of department at Department of Cross-Sectoral Environmental Affairs and Sustainable Development; Ministry of the Environment and Conservation, Agriculture and Consumer Protection of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Tumbrinck, Josef	31 March 2009	president at NABU NRW

**Flanders**

Bas, Luc	26 July 2007 and 12 January 2010	head of government relations Europe at The Climate Group  adviser at cabinet of State Secretary for Sustainable Development and Social Economy; Belgian Federal Government (between 2006 and 2007)  policy adviser at the Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government (between 2001 and 2006)
Decroos, Marjan	31 March 2008	environment attaché at Flemish Representation; Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU (between 2001 and 2002)
De Mulder, Jan	25 May 2009	policy adviser at Public Governance Department; Flemish Government  public governance attaché at Flemish Representation; Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU  legal adviser at Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government (between 1994 and 2006)
Dua, Vera	27 November 2009	Minister of Environment and Agriculture (Agalev); Flemish Government (between 1999 and 2003)
Merckx, Remy	31 July 2007	head of division at International Environmental Policy Division; Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government
Poppelier, Guido	12 October 2009	adviser at cabinet of State Secretary for Sustainable Development and Social Economy; Belgian Federal Government (between 2004 and 2007)  environment attaché at Flemish Representation; Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU (between 2001 and 2002)
Van den Bilcke, Chris	19 March 2008	head of division at Sustainable Development and Environment Cell; Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation; Belgian Federal Government
Vaneycken Sven	22 September 2009	adviser at cabinet of Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Public Service, Public Enterprises and Institutional Reforms; Belgian Federal Government  policy officer at Federal Public Planning Service Sustainable Development; Belgian Federal Government (between 2003 and 2008)

Verbeke, Griet	31 July 2007	policy adviser at International Environmental Policy Division; Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government
Verheeke, Jan	28 August 2009	secretary ad interim at Minaraad adviser at cabinet of Minister of Environment and Nature; Flemish Government (between 2004 and 2009)
Walpot, Oda	31 August 2007	task holder at Sustainable Development Team; General Governmental Policy Service; Flemish Government
<b>International</b>		
Chasek, Pamela	6 May 2009	executive director at Earth Negotiations Bulletin; Reporting Services; International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)
Dodds, Felix	8 May 2009	executive Director at Stakeholder Forum for a sustainable future
Gurban, Gyorgyi	21 September 2009	policy officer at DG Environment; European Commission
Mazijn, Bernard	12 May 2009	president of the Annual Meeting of Sustainable Development Experts 2009-2010; OECD
Stielstra, Hans	21 September 2009	head of unit at DG Environment; European Commission
Vatanen, Lea	18 November 2009	policy coordinator at DG Secretariat-General; European Commission
Vaturi, Tonya	7 May 2009 and 11 May 2009	programme officer at Division for Sustainable Development; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Wagner, Lynn	7 May 2009	manager/editor at Knowledge Management Products; Reporting Services; International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)